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RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 1477
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RUEHBUL/AMEMBASSY KABUL 2188
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SUBJECT: TAJIK OFFICIALS ATTEMPT TO ARREST AND DEPORT AMERICAN
JEHOVAH'S WITNESS

REF: A) SEPTTEL: JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES FIGHTING TO IMPORT LITERATURE, B) DUSHANBE 790 C) DUSHANBE 623 D) 06 DUSHANBE 1354

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11. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: The government of Tajikistan continues to squeeze nongovernmental organizations and religious groups, its latest target being the Jehovah's Witnesses. On July 13, two men identifying themselves as officers of the State Committee on National Security detained an American citizen Jehovah's Witness on the street in Dushanbe and threatened him with arrest and deportation. The incident follows a pattern of harassment against the Jehovah's Witnesses by Tajik security officials who were responsible for the confiscation of three containers of imported Jehovah's Witness literature and detention and interrogation of local members (REFTELS B-D). The July 13 attempt to deport a Jehovah's Witness for proselytizing indicates that the government is becoming less tolerant of religious activity.

12. (SBU) The Jehovah's Witnesses have faced ongoing registration problems with local government, and the State Committee on National Security has detained, questioned and verbally harassed local members in the past. However, in recent months, since the group began importing larger shipments of religious literature, government scrutiny and pressure has escalated. The Tajik government may be fearful of a growing population of Christian converts, or simply concerned with what they perceive as Western involvement in religious and other social activism.

13. (SBU) Although proselytizing is not illegal under the current body of law, according to Department of Religious Affairs officials, the government receives many complaints from local Tajiks about Christian proselytization and the government in practice disapproves of proselytizing. Other international faith-based organizations suspected of proselytizing have been harassed in the past. Embassy sources say that the State Committee on National Security assumes that American citizens working with faith-based international organizations in Tajikistan intend to spark a "color revolution." The draft law on religion and religious associations, which is rumored to pass into law before the end of the year, does prohibit proselytizing and it appears that the State Committee on National Security is attempting to apply the draft law prior to its formal adoption by parliament and the president. END SUMMARY AND COMMENT.

14. (SBU) James Hwang was walking down a main street in Dushanbe July 13 with his wife, Jane Hwang, and another Jehovah's Witnesses American couple, Gregory and Martha Olds, when James Hwang said he recognized a local man who had just passed them. According to Hwang, the man had earlier been involved in the physical assault of a Tajik Jehovah's Witness. The four Americans then entered a store and two men identifying themselves as officers of the State Committee on National Security stopped them upon exiting. The two female American citizens kept walking to avoid the confrontation, while James Hwang was detained by the officers and Gregory Olds, a visiting attorney from the Jehovah's Witness headquarters, remained. According to Olds, the officers kept insisting to him that he was "free to go," and that they wanted to take Hwang with them. Olds asked the officers if they could go to the U.S. Embassy, at which point Hwang called ConOff. ConOff asked to talk to the officers by telephone to understand what the charges were and where they would be taking Hwang, as neither Olds nor Hwang spoke Russian. The officer at first refused to take the phone from Hwang, then, after ConOff identified himself on the phone, hung up.

15. (SBU) ConOff arrived at the scene approximately half an hour after Hwang had first been stopped. ConOff asked the officers for identification, whether they planned to arrest Hwang, and what the charges were. One officer, Captain Khalimon Saliboev, provided identification, but the second responded that he did not have any on him at the time. When asked what his name was, he replied Ivan Tojev. [COMMENT: The officer

hesitated before responding, as if to think of a name to use. END COMMENT] The two officers said that Hwang had to voluntarily leave Tajikistan immediately or face arrest and deportation. They said they had told the same to Hwang and that they expected him and his wife to be at Dushanbe International Airport at 6 a.m. the next day to leave on the first available flight. [COMMENT: An unreasonable request, seeing as Hwang did not have a visa for any of the countries with flights the next day. END COMMENT] After repeatedly asking for clarification of

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the charges resulting in the threatened deportation, Saliboev dispatched Tojev for the document which detailed them, but in Tajiki which Saliboev only partially translated for ConOff. The order from the prosecutor's office stated that Hwang had been illegally living at an address at which he had not registered, and that he had illegally proselytized at a school. When ConOff mentioned that to his understanding, Hwang had been registered and had re-registered at his new address, Saliboev said that the primary concern was Hwang's illegal religious activities and their impact on children. According to Saliboev, Hwang had been talking about religion with children, which resulted in numerous complaints to the Department of Religious Affairs from students, parents and teachers of School number 16 in Dushanbe. Hwang later told ConOff that this was an outright lie, as he had never set foot in a school in Dushanbe. Hwang believes that the proselytizing charges stem from a different incident on May 11. Hwang had been with another local Jehovah's Witness on May 11 near a store in Dushanbe. The local had offered to share a religious magazine with a passerby, who happened to work for the Department of Religious Affairs. According to Hwang, he was called over by the passerby and asked to sign a statement saying who he was and where he lived. The address Hwang provided was different than that at which he was registered, leading to the false registration charges. ConOff subsequently assisted Hwang in clarifying that he was properly registered with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the correct address.

16. (SBU) ConOff asked Saliboev how an alien could be deported without a hearing or a chance to appeal. Saliboev ignored the question and insisted to ConOff that they (the State Committee on National Security) were trying to be nice, and that they did not want to have to arrest Hwang. They repeated that they expected Hwang and his wife to be at the airport the next day and left. ConOff subsequently escorted Hwang and Olds to the Embassy. At the Embassy, the Ambassador also met with Hwang and Olds to express concern about treatment of American citizens and rule of law and religious freedom issues. A Kazakh citizen Jehovah's Witness, Vladimir Voyevodin, who is a lawyer for the organization, also joined Olds and Hwang. Olds and Hwang told ConOff they had decided not to fight this, but to have Hwang and his wife leave the country. At 19:30, Voyevodin called to ask ConOff to inquire about a Kyrgyz visa for Hwang. ConOff called the Kyrgyz Consul, only to be told that if Tajik authorities were deporting Hwang, then that information would be in the Kyrgyz immigration system and Hwang would not receive a visa. ConOff called Hwang to convey this information and Hwang reported that he was "in hiding" and arranging to leave the country. ConOff, PolOff and DCM met with Olds and Voyevodin July 16, after being unable to reach either Hwang, Olds or Voyevodin July 15. Olds reported to ConOff that James and Jane Hwang had left the country "immediately." Olds would not reveal where the Hwangs were, but insisted they were safe and had left Tajikistan.

17. (SBU) Greg Olds informed EmbOffs his wife, Mary, has also departed Tajikistan. He is unsure how much longer he will remain in country, but will attempt to meet with government officials to release the confiscated religious literature. Olds says that Jehovah's Witnesses are determined to continue importing religious literature and carrying out the group's mission in Tajikistan.

18. (U) James Hwang has signed a Privacy Act waiver related to this incident.
JACOBSON